DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 265 800 HE 019 051

AUTHOR Boyer, Carol M.; McGuinness, Aims C., Jr.
TITLE State Initiatives to Improve Undergraduate Education: ECS Survey Highlights.
INSTITUTION American Association for Higher Education, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE Feb 86
NOTE 6p.
AVAILABLE FROM American Association for Higher Education, One Dupont Circle, Suite 600, Washington, DC 20036.
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Viewpoints (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
JOURNAL CIT AAHE Bulletin; p3-7 Feb 1986

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Articulation (Education); Basic Skills; College School Cooperation; Educational Change; *Educational Improvement; Educational Testing; *Government School Relationship; Higher Education; Incentives; Outcomes of Education; *Self Evaluation (Groups); State Aid; State Standards; *Statewide Planning; *Student Evaluation; Two Year Colleges; *Undergraduate Study
IDENTIFIERS *Excellence in Education

ABSTRACT

State efforts to improve the quality of undergraduate education were surveyed by the Education Commission of the States. All 50 states and the District of Columbia have initiatives to improve undergraduate education. The high school/college transition is perceived by state officials as an area with great potential for bringing about real change in education. Ideas considered by some states include: early assessment programs, an alternative to placement testing; and disseminating a statement of knowledge and skills needed for success in college. Also receiving attention are articulation agreements for transfer from two- to four-year institutions, and assessment of student and institutional performance. Recent state assessment initiatives include: testing basic skills of entering freshmen, testing basic skills and competencies of college students, value-added assessment of student outcomes, and providing incentives for colleges and universities to better define and measure their objectives. Some states have established or are considering special incentive funding for undergraduate education. In addition to institutional or systemwide reviews of undergraduate education, states are conducting comprehensive studies of higher education. (SW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

STATE INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION
ECS Survey Highlights

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

AAHE

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED265800

HE019051

by Carol M. Boyer and Aims C. McGuinness, Jr

Governors, legislators, and other state leaders today show increased concern about the quality of undergraduate education in the nation's public colleges and universities. To gauge the extent of that concern, the Education Commission of the States (ECS) recently surveyed state academic officers.* Strikingly, we found that all 50 states and the District of Columbia now have initiatives to improve undergraduate education.

The eagerness of states to move with vigor on these issues is illustrated by the range of policy initiatives under way. These initiatives cover subjects as diverse as admissions standards, high school/college transition, "value-added" assessment of student outcomes, alternative resource allocation and funding mechanisms, special incentive funding for undergraduate education, and blue-ribbon commissions on higher education within a state. The full range of state initiatives is shown in Table 1.

Following are highlights of these initiatives.

High School/College Transition

The high school/college transition is perceived by state officials as an area with great potential for bringing about real change in education. To the extent that states can play a role in bridging the gap between high school and college, the experiences of students at both levels will be strengthened.

Interest in high school/college transition has been a state concern since the early 1980s. Many states have already addressed the issue in some way and are now refining or broadening their efforts. Eighteen states currently report initiatives in this area. The nature of these initiatives varies from state to state. Five states—Alaska, Arizona, Indiana, Montana, and Ohio—are considering or implementing "early assessment" programs. An alternative to placement testing, these programs typically assess the readiness of high school juniors for college-level work in areas such as writing, science, and mathematics. In some cases, students receive feedback from the college of their choice as to their likely placement in specific college courses. Such feedback allows students to take appropriate corrective action during their senior year in high school.

Five states currently report efforts to agree upon and disseminate a statement of the knowledge, capacities, and skills needed for success in college-level work. Efforts are well along in three of them: Nevada's Joint Council on College Preparation has issued such a statement; Oregon's Committee on the High School College Connection has issued two statements (one on English skills, the other on mathematics) and has plans for additional publications; and the Arizona Board of Regents is in the process of publishing such a statement. Efforts in two other states are in earlier stages of development: New York's Board of

Carol M. Boyer is senior policy analyst for higher education at the Education Commission of the States.

Aims C. McGuinness, Jr. is assistant executive director for higher education at the Education Commission of the States.

** The survey was conducted by Jessica Kozloff, a 1985-86 American Council on Education fellow and special assistant to the president of the University of Northern Colorado. ECS greatly appreciates the cooperation of the academic officers of the State Higher Education Executive Officers and their staffs in responding to the telephone survey.*

TABLE I **Summary of Recent State Initiatives to**

Initiatives	States
Admissions standards	California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Nevada, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota
Articulation agreements for student transfer from two- to four-year institutions	Alabama, Alaska, Colorado, Florida, South Carolina, Wyoming
Community colleges	California, Minnesota, Tennessee, Wyoming
Comprehensive studies of higher education by blue-ribbon, gubernatorial, or interim legislative committee	Arkansas, California, Colorado, Delaware, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Texas, Washington, Wisconsin
Core curriculum	Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, Oregon
Faculty reward systems and certification	Arizona, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Washington
Graduate teaching assistants	Arizona, Kansas
High school/college transition	Alaska, Arizona, Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont
Institutional or systemwide reviews of undergraduate education	California, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Maine, New York, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin
Mission redefinition and differentiation	Colorado, Idaho, Maine, Missouri, Vermont, Wisconsin

Regents has just initiated its Expectations Project in which college presidents will meet to develop reasonable guidelines for high school exit and college admission; and Alaska's Committee on Preparation for College Success is considering a publication that will make known its expectations to high school students.

Eight states—Arkansas, California, Florida, Indiana, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, and Ohio—currently report initiatives that deal specifically with remedial education, an area that is an important component of the high school/college transition.

Articulation Agreements for Transfer from Two- to Four-Year Institutions

Easing student transfer from two- to four-year institutions is closely related to the high school/college transition issue; not only is it important to prepare students better for their undergraduate experience, but mechanisms also are needed to insure that students who begin college-level study in community colleges can transfer easily to four-year institutions. The need for such mechanisms is intensified by the situations of many older part-time students for whom college attendance is not their primary responsibility.

For some time, most states have had policies that facilitated student transfer both within and across state systems of higher education. Increasingly, however, states are beginning to challenge and modify those policies. South Carolina's Commission on Higher Education has developed new articulation agreements between its two- and four-year institutions. Alabama's Department of Postsecondary Education reports that two task forces have been appointed to examine articulation agreements between two- and four-year institutions. Colorado's Commission on Higher Education has been charged with the development and enforcement of transfer agreements. And Alaska's recently completed statewide plan recommends the development of articulation/transfer agreements. Florida's Postsecondary Education Commission has taken a somewhat different approach; annual studies of transfer students will be conducted and community colleges will receive information about the attrition rates of their students. Finally, Wyoming's Coordinating Board for Community Colleges is currently reviewing articulation agreements between four of its seven community colleges and the state university.

Assessment of Student and Institutional Performance

Assessment is certainly receiving increased attention these days, as evidenced at least in part by the unexpectedly large attendance at the AAHE-designed National Conference on Assessment in Higher Education, sponsored jointly with the National Institute of Education and held October 13-15, 1985, at the University of South Carolina in Columbia. Contributing to interest in assessment is a task force of governors on "College Quality," chaired by Governor John Ashcroft of Missouri. The Ashcroft task force—one of seven established by the National Governors' Association under the leadership of Governor

Improve the Quality of Undergraduate Education

Initiatives	States
Program and institutional review	Alabama, Colorado, Georgia, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Washington, West Virginia, Wyoming
Program approval regulations	Connecticut, Louisiana, New Mexico, Pennsylvania
Remedial education	Arkansas, California, Florida, Indiana, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, Ohio
Resource allocation and funding mechanisms	Kentucky, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, Wisconsin
Special incentive funding for undergraduate education	Arizona, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, Ohio, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia
Statewide plan by higher education agency or board	Alaska, Idaho, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, North Dakota, Oregon, South Carolina, Utah, Wisconsin
Student aid and scholarships	Massachusetts, Montana, Nebraska
Teacher education reforms	Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina
Testing basic skills of entering freshmen	District of Columbia, Montana, New Jersey
Testing basic skills and competencies of college students (i.e., "rising junior" exams)	Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, New Jersey, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas
"Value-added" assessment of student outcomes	Alaska, Colorado, Missouri, New Jersey, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah

Lamar Alexander of Tennessee—has an ambitious agenda: to advise states on measuring college effectiveness and student learning, and on determining how such information can be reported to the public. The task force held its first hearings in St. Louis in mid-December. Additional hearings are planned for February and April 1986. A final report will be presented at the NGA meeting in July.

What happens in the whole area of assessing student and institutional performance has important and far-reaching implications. One of the difficulties with the term "assessment," however, is that it increasingly is being used to refer to several different activities, from narrowly defined achievement testing to broadly defined student assessment, from evaluating student progress to evaluating institutional or program effectiveness, from diagnosing student needs to certifying minimum levels of student achievement. The range of recent state initiatives labeled "assessment" is illustrated in the remainder of this section.

Testing basic skills of entering freshmen. States are beginning to establish statewide testing programs not for the purpose of controlling admission but for use in student counseling and placement in courses or programs. New Jersey's Basic Skills Assessment Program is perhaps the best known of such programs. Initiated in 1978 and now marketed nationwide by the College Board, the basic-skills assessment is administered to all entering freshmen and transfer students in New Jersey's public colleges and universities. The District of Columbia is currently developing a basic-skills testing program, and Montana's University System Board of Regents has a program that requires mathematics proficiency exams of all entering freshmen. These programs usually include feedback to secondary schools for the purpose of improving student preparation for college.

Testing basic skills and competencies of college students. Another example of the growing interest in assessment is the introduction of "rising junior" exams (e.g., Florida's College Level Academic Skills Test and Georgia's Regents Exam). These exams are used to determine whether students have mastered basic skills and competencies before advancing to upper-division courses or programs. As an alternative to more restrictive admission requirements for community colleges or other lower-division programs, these tests provide a means for students to demonstrate readiness for further study (or need for remedial education) before advancing to upper-division courses or programs. Six states—Arkansas, Maryland, New Jersey, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Texas—report that such programs are currently being considered.

"Value-added" assessment of student outcomes. Several states report that they have already taken action or are beginning to act in this area. The Missouri legislature recently approved a new role and mission statement for Northeast Missouri State University (as a statewide liberal arts col-

lege), explicitly recognizing the success of that institution with value-added assessment of student outcomes. New Jersey's Board of Higher Education recently passed a resolution establishing an advisory committee to recommend the design and mode of implementation of a comprehensive college-outcomes evaluation program. South Dakota has already initiated value-added assessment of student outcomes at the end of the freshman year and again at graduation. Tennessee's Higher Education Commission is currently revising the performance criteria for the state's performance-based funding program, with particular attention to value-added scoring, variable weighting, alumni surveys, and outcomes reevaluation. Recent legislation requires Colorado's Commission on Higher Education to develop a program that will hold the state's governing boards "accountable for a demonstrable improvement in student knowledge, capacity, and skills between entrance and graduation." Efforts are just getting under way in at least two other states: an advisory committee to South Carolina's Commission on Higher Education is discussing methods by which student achievement can be measured; and Alaska's recently completed statewide plan recommends that the University of Alaska and the state's private institutions make a commitment to value-added assessment of student outcomes.

Other assessment activity. Recent interest in assessment, however, goes beyond the efforts just described. The Tennessee performance-based funding program was the first deliberate state effort to provide incentives for colleges and universities to define more clearly their objectives and to establish means for measuring the extent to which those objectives are achieved. Until 1984 the Tennessee program was voluntary, with only general state guidelines on how colleges and universities could qualify for incentive funding. Now, however, college and university participation is required, and Tennessee has specified what areas must be examined and how.

Other states require their colleges and universities to show how information on a variety of outcome measures is being used in the review of existing academic programs. Institutions such as Northeast Missouri State University also are making extensive use of outcomes data in overall institutional planning as well as in curriculum evaluation and improvement. Limited evidence suggests that colleges and universities can make effective use of outcomes data in their curriculum-reform efforts. Before other states act on that evidence, however, more discussion is needed on how and under what conditions the use of outcomes data can be linked to state policy without accompanying negative consequences.

> *"Virginia and New Jersey have established competitive-grant programs modeled after the federal Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education."*

Incentive Funding for Undergraduate Education

Twelve states report that they have established or are considering special incentive funding for undergraduate education (see Table 1). The nature and scope of such funding varies from one state to another. In 1985-86, for example, Florida targeted $3.5 million for the reduction of class size and the improvement of academic advising; this appropriation was in addition to $2.75 million appropriated for these and related efforts in the previous year. In 1985-86, Colorado's Quality Incentive Funding Program is allocating $1 million on a competitive grant basis to institutions for improving undergraduate education or for exemplary efforts to do so.

Virginia and New Jersey have established competitive-grant programs modeled after the federal Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE). For 1986-88, Virginia's State Council of Higher Education will target $2 million of its $2.5 million allocation to its Funds for Excellence program for the enhancement of undergraduate teaching and for curriculum development in the arts and sciences. New Jersey's Board of Higher Education recently announced that two of its state colleges, Jersey City State College and Kean College, will share nearly $10 million in state funds as the first recipients of the state's challenge-grant program to promote excellence in undergraduate education.

Systemwide Reviews and Comprehensive Studies

Eleven states—California, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Maine, New York, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin—report that they are in various stages of conducting institutional or systemwide reviews of undergraduate education. In addition, 13 states report that comprehensive studies of

State action, even though relatively blunt at times, is stimulating public colleges and universities to scrutinize their undergraduate programs and to undertake their own renewal and reform.

higher education are being planned or are already underway, indicating a widening of interest beyond issues in undergraduate education. Four of the 13 states (California, Maryland, Rhode Island, and Texas) report that such comprehensive reviews are in early stages; the other nine states—Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Kentucky, Maine, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Washington, and Wisconsin—report that comprehensive reviews are well under way or have recently been completed.

Summary

States are now engaged in a variety of efforts to improve the quality of undergraduate education. They are raising fundamental questions about who should go to college, what those who are admitted should learn, and what should be expected of those who graduate. The intensity of these concerns varies from state to state, but there is little doubt that they will be on the political agenda in most states for at least the next few years.

The willingness of states to take action is at once promising and problematic. States (either individually or through regional or national organizations such as the Education Commission of the States, the National Governors' Association, or the Southern Regional Education Board) are assuming a nationwide leadership role at a time when the federal role—at least in terms of funding—continues to decline. State action, even though relatively blunt at times, is stimulating public colleges and universities to scrutinize their undergraduate programs and to undertake their own renewal and reform.

The potential for positive state influence on undergraduate education is enormous. This is especially so given the state-based legal and governance structure within which public colleges and universities operate, current enrollment in state-supported institutions (more than three-fourths of those attending colleges and universities), and the dominant state role in financing undergraduate education (in contrast to the historic federal role in supporting graduate education and research). If, however, state policies are not well-conceived and carefully implemented, the results could be counterproductive.

With this in mind, Governor Thomas H. Kean of New Jersey, as 1985-86 chairman of ECS, has initiated a three-year project on Effective State Action to Improve Undergraduate Education. This ECS project is guided by a working party of 20 political and education leaders who met for the first time on December 3-4, 1985. The project's analyses and periodic reports aim toward informed state policies that advance the public interest in effective undergraduate experiences for all students. ■